

Schwerpunkt Informationsverhalten

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When information sharing becomes an event: An example of Private-Public Film Screenings

Private-Public Screenings is a new film distribution method aimed specifically at connecting people. Its purpose is to provide a film to private persons free of charge and encourage them to share the film in a public way, so that sharing information becomes a social activity. This research investigated the extent of openness of these events. It examined whether or not people who host Private-Public Screenings actually make them public. Results of a survey among 135 hosts of a recent run of Private-Public Screenings show that people have indeed opened their homes to strangers for the purpose of creating an event and sharing a film.

Descriptors: Film, Distribution, Private household, Empirical study

Private-Public Film Screenings – Offener Treffpunkt für den Informationsaustausch im privaten Bereich

Private-Public Screenings ist ein neuer Ansatz des Filmvertriebs, in den es vor allem darum geht, Menschen zu verbinden. Bei diesem Ansatz erhalten Privatpersonen gratis Zugang zum Film und werden gleichzeitig eingeladen, die Filmvorführung für andere zu öffnen, so dass das Teilen von Information zu einer sozialen Aktivität wird. Diese Studie untersuchte inwieweit diese Veranstaltungen tatsächlich offen sind, indem erfasst wurde, ob und inwieweit die Gastgeber der Filmvorführungen diese für Fremde geöffnet haben. Ergebnisse eines Fragebogens unter 135 Gastgebern des vergangenen Private-Public Screenings zeigen, dass Menschen in der Tat ihre eigenen Wohnungen für Fremde geöffnet haben, um gemeinsam selbst ein Ereignis um einen Film herum zu schaffen.

Deskriptoren: Film, Vertrieb, Privathaushalt, empirische Untersuchung

Quand le partage de l'information devient de l'événementiel: Un exemple de projections de films public-privé

Les projections de films public-privé représentent une nouvelle approche de la distribution de films visant singulièrement à relier les gens. Dans cette approche, des particuliers bénéficient d'un accès gratuit au film et sont invités en même temps à ouvrir la projection du film à d'autres personnes, de sorte que le partage d'informations devienne une activité sociale. Cette étude examine dans quelle mesure ces événements sont effectivement ouverts en vérifiant si et dans quelle mesure les hôtes de ces projections les ont ouvertes à des tiers. Les résultats d'un questionnaire auprès de 135 hôtes des dernières projections public-privé montrent que les particuliers ont en effet ouvert leurs maisons à des tiers dans le but de mettre sur pied un événement autour d'un film.

Descripteurs: Film, Distribution, Particulier, Etude empirique

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Introduction

Private-Public Screenings is a new film distribution method aimed specifically at connecting people. Its purpose is to provide a film to private persons free of charge and encourage them to share the film in a public way, so that sharing information becomes a social activity. Yet, encouraging people to donate money and actually receiving money are rarely the same thing. Likewise people might be encouraged to share a film in a public way, but it is not clear if they actually do. Therefore, this research investigated the extent of openness of these events. It examined whether or not people who host Private-Public Screenings actually make them public.

In 2006, the Pew Research Center titled a study "Increasingly, Americans prefer going to the movies at home" (Pew Research Center, 2006) which concluded

that 75% of adults prefer watching movies at home over going to the cinema. The growing preference for watching movies at home corresponds with the increasing variety of movie viewing services and options available. The success of video-on-demand producers reached a new level when in August 2013 the Netflix drama series *House of Cards* received nine Emmy nominations – the first time ever a series produced by an online-only program has been nominated. Hardware solutions like *Google Chromecast* that make streaming on the home television easier fly off the shelves.

Yet, the proliferation of online offers does not reduce people's need for community. On the contrary: people increasingly use the Internet to assist and inform each other, as seen through sites such as *Skillshare.com* and *Couchsurfing.com*. This need for shared community experience is the basis for a new viewing method of films, which is called Private-Public Screenings. The purpose of Private-Public Screenings is to release a film for free and encourage the audience to create a social event around it, thereby, creating a shared experience.

Private-Public-Screenings

Private-Public Screenings is a concept developed by Rasmus Stolberg and Efterklang, a Copenhagen-based music group (Efterklang.net, 2013). It was developed as a method of distribution for a film the band produced and released in 2011, and was used again for a second film they released in 2013. Private-Public Screenings is a film distribution method aimed specifically at connecting people. Its purpose is to provide a film to private persons free of charge and encourage them to share the film in a public way. Anyone worldwide can sign up to host the film in any location they choose, to take place within a specified date range, provided they register it on the film's website and agree to follow a set of rules. The exceptions for Private-Public Screenings are cinemas, music venues, and others with established connections in the entertainment industry, which are not considered "private" and who are thus asked to create Official Screenings that exist under a different set of rules. The rules of Private-Public Screenings are straightforward and clearly outlined on the film websites (The Ghost of Piramida, 2013):

- "The screenings need to have free entrance
- The screenings need to be public
- The screenings need to have a minimum capacity of 5 people

- *The screenings need to be verified by Efterklang & Andreas Koefoed and only screenings that are featured on www.theghostofpiramida.com are official Private-Public Screenings"*

The process for hosting a Private-Public Screening is fairly simple: A person interested in hosting a screening fills out the online registration form, which includes information on where and when the screening will take place, how many guests can be accommodated, whether the screening is open or fully booked, and a box for additional information, such as how the film will be screened, seating arrangements, or requests for guests to bring items, e. g. snacks or beverages. Once the screenings administrator approves a screening, the host receives a confirmation email and a link to a promotional poster. The hosts are encouraged to promote their screenings through social media and other networks.

The screening is then listed on the film's website by country, city, date and with an indication of whether it is *open* or *fully booked* so that those seeking to attend a screening can locate an open screening in their area. If a person finds one in their area, they can request an invitation to it through the website. The host will receive an email indicating that someone would like to join their screening and the host can then choose to reply. No sensitive information about the host, such as email or physical addresses, is given out without the consent of the host.

The purpose of Private-Public Screenings is to bring people together, either through their interest in the band, music, film, or events, who may not otherwise have a chance to meet, thereby creating a community centered event and a shared experience. But the organizers of Private-Public Screenings do not require that hosts open their homes. Consideration is given to privacy and hosts are never obligated to open their home (or other chosen venues) to strangers. Therefore, if a host prefers not to make their screening public, or if space is limited, registering a screening as *fully booked* will disable invitation requests.

One week before the scheduled screening, the host receives a link to a download package that contains the film in a high-resolution .movfile (1,9GB). The hosts are asked to test the film and the sound before the date of their screening so that any problems can be addressed beforehand. Further, the hosts are encouraged to take a photo of their screenings and attendees and send it, along with a description, to Efterklang, who then share it on their flickr photo blog. These photos are collected as sets, titled *An Island* (2011) and *The Ghost of Piramida* (2013) and serve as a representation of the Private-Public

Screenings community (Flickr, 2011; Flickr, 2013). While the film is provided for free, donations are welcome and both the correspondence emails and the website contain a link to PayPal, where hosts can donate if they chose to do so.

Background

The reasoning behind the introduction of this new viewing mode is that people nowadays choose to download or stream films instead of going to the cinema. Several newer (mostly private) reports show the continual decrease in cinema attendance, for example, a report from Goldman Sachs (Stebner, 2012) that shows that “attendance per person hit a 25-year low in 2011.” Movie producers are struggling to adapt to the changing markets and their attempts are frequently unsuccessful, as an experiment of Universal Pictures demonstrated with their film “Tower Heist,” which was distributed as video-on-demand three weeks after its appearance in movie theatres and subsequently failed (Raj, 2012). On the other hand, video-on-demand services are constantly on the rise. More people currently possess more high-end home cinema equipment, making for better home viewing experiences. This trend lends itself to an ideal starting point for hardware to build one’s own cinema at home. So why should people be interested in opening their homes for strangers in Private-Public Screenings?

Watching a film is – in its foundation – a social affair. In a series of studies Oehlberg et al. (2009) examined how people interact in front of a television set. The studies expand on the work of James Lull, who published essays in the 1980s on the social aspects of television. An initial survey from Oehlberg’s study confirms that the majority of respondents participated in “viewing parties,” where friends gather to watch the latest episode of a show. The researchers created an experiment to reproduce a viewing party in which the participants’ social interactions were analyzed and observed and they recorded clear social interaction rules dependent on the content of the show. This early research supports the idea that viewing media with others does in fact hold a social aspect. Private-Public Screenings seeks to deepen that aspect by creating a community event around a specific piece of media and encourages a shared experience.

But the idea for Private-Public Screenings is not based only on the knowledge that watching a film is in itself a social activity. It also builds on economic research that has demonstrated that people remember best what they have experienced firsthand. Therefore, giving

people the opportunity to co-create a venture will leave a lasting and meaningful impression (Boswijk et al., 2007). And while Private-Public Screenings do not operate based on economic motivations, they nevertheless further the “brand” (and thus the economic future) of the band that developed it, by creating meaningful experiences for the hosts and viewers. By allowing each host to create and control their own screenings, they gain a personal stake in the venture through co-creation, and thus, the experience becomes more memorable than simply going to the cinema.

For the band Efterklang, creating music has always been their ultimate goal. They are artists first, but ones who have found it necessary to deal with the commercial side of music in order to make a living. They have been successful in their musical endeavors thus far, but there is always a desire to take things further. That has led them on a path to seek out new opportunities and experiment with new mediums, which in this case is film. However, a lack of knowledge in the area of film distribution forced them to develop their own method. Today’s proliferation of digital content has forced several artists to re-think how they distribute their material. In 2007, Prince passed on a traditional record release, opting instead for free CDs inserted into *The Mail on Sunday* that fell directly into the hands of the public (Farouky, 2007). More recently in the distribution debate, Thom Yorke put his record in the peer-to-peer file sharing network BitTorrent, while U2 partnered with Apple to gift every iTunes user with their new album, whether they wanted it or not (Warhurst, 2014). In these cases, as with Private-Public Screenings, success is not measured in terms of financial gain. Instead, what Private-Public Screenings has achieved is to set Efterklang apart from a majority of bands in the music industry. Not only has it showcased their ability to create beautiful films, but it also functioned as a valuable tool for connecting the audience to the artist and building a new means of sharing information and artistic content.

Information sharing has been the object of study in various aspects, but typically research on information sharing focuses on how individuals gain from sharing information between themselves (Pilerot & Limberg, 2011; Fisher & Coward, 2010; Talja, 2002). In the case of Private-Public Screenings the intent of information sharing is to create an event. In that sense it adds a new understanding of social sharing, which so far has been mostly used in psychological research about social sharing of emotions (Curci & Rimé, 2012) or in computer science research as sharing of pieces of information, as for example the study from Cesar et al. (2009) about a mother’s

wish to share different pieces of a film to different family members.

Users of *skillshare* gain directly from receiving help with skills they do not possess. *Couchsurfers* get a free space to sleep while simultaneously making new friends. The underlying purpose of Private-Public Screenings is very similar: it aims at bringing people together by creating an event where people share an experience through film. But there might be one important difference, which adds a new dimension to social sharing. If the attendees of a Private-Public Screenings event all know each other beforehand, the sharing of the film is foremost a private event –much like *skillshare* and *couchsurfing* are private events. If, however, hosts open their homes and make the event so called publicly available, then the social sharing becomes a public event.

The name Private-Public Screenings derives from Efterklang's desire to distribute the film to private persons in the hope that they will share the film publicly. In order to investigate the private or public nature of Private-Public Screenings, it is necessary to supply the terms with a firm definition. Based on Weintraub's concept of a protean definition (Weintraub & Kumar, 1997), a private space can be defined as any location that requires an invitation to enter, meaning it cannot be accessed or entered by anyone without being given prior consent. In regards to Private-Public

Screenings, a *private space* shall be defined as any of the following: a home, a room in a house, an office, work studio, rehearsal space, or private institution. According to Weintraub, public space is a location where anyone is free to enter during that location's open or operating hours. A Private-Public Screening held in a *public space* is (based on survey responses) hereby defined as any of the following: a café, bar, club, shop, library, gallery, graveyard, cinema, lecture hall, classroom or auditorium, common area, or cultural center. Image 1 below give an impression of size and atmosphere of these events.

Method

The most recent run of Private-Public Screenings took place between February 1 and March 31, 2013. The film distributed was called *The Ghost of Piramida*, a documentary directed by Andreas Koefoed that follows Efterklang on an excursion to an abandoned mining town on Svalbard, where they gathered sounds and inspiration for a new album, woven together with footage and narrated memories of a former resident. At the end of the project, after 719 registered screenings, the screenings' administrator sent out a survey to the hosts who had participated. The survey was open for responses for two

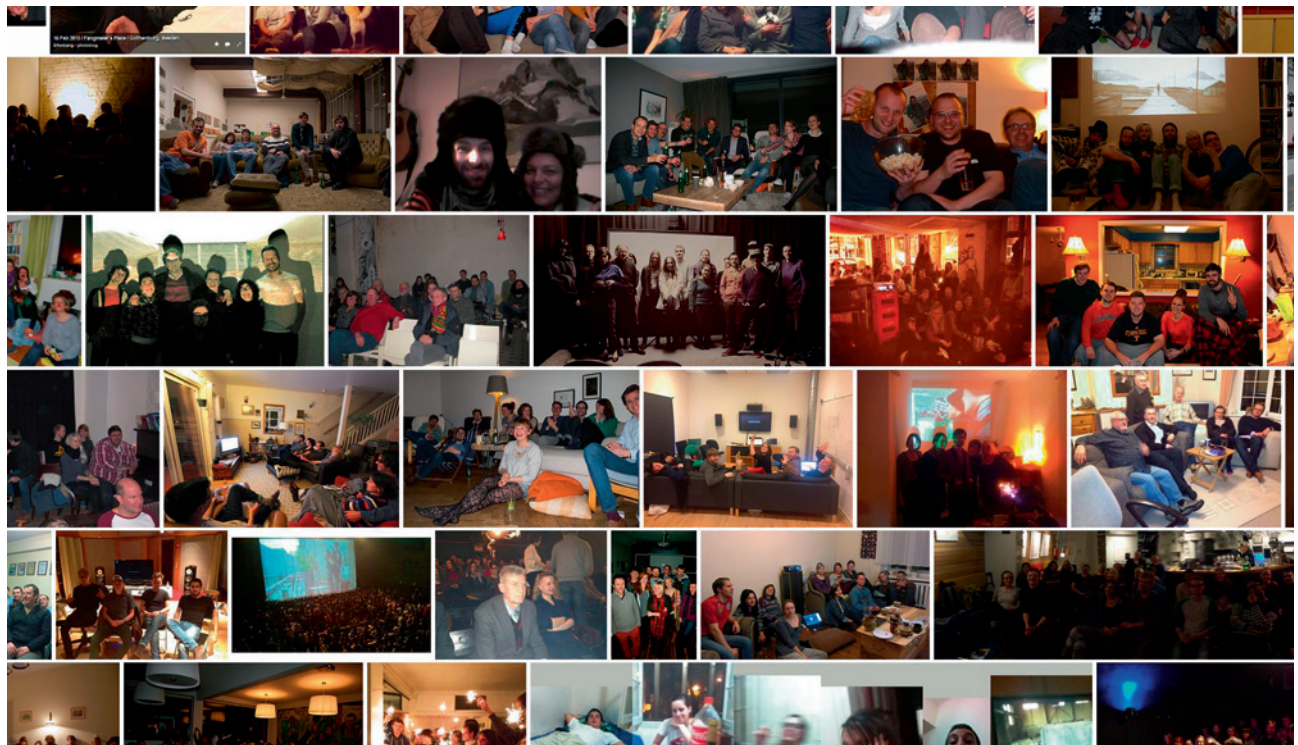


Image 1: Private-Public Screening of *The Ghost of Piramida*, Melbourne, Australia (Flickr, 2013).

weeks, although most respondents answered within a day or two of the email.

The purpose of the survey was twofold. The first reason was to gather general feedback that could prove useful to the band when creating future Private-Public Screenings, and the second was to gather information on how people experienced this method of information distribution. The survey consisted of fifteen questions, ranging from collecting general background information such as age, sex, and living situation, to more specific areas, such as: which devices were used to show the film, how the hosts experienced the screening or whether they were likely to participate in future Private-Public Screenings. The participants needed only to answer those questions they felt comfortable with and were free to provide as much or as little information as they wanted. Of particular interest were two questions on the location of the screening and the openness of it.

Where did you hold your screening? (Was it at home or in an office, café, library...?)

Did you register your screening as Open or Fully Booked? (If possible, can you explain your choice?)

An additional question asked more concretely, in an open answer form, more about the open screenings.

If you registered an Open screening, did anyone new to you (previously unknown or outside your usual social network) attend? (Was it a positive / negative experience? Can you explain?)

Results and Analysis

Seven hundred nineteen Private-Public Screenings hosts were sent an email requesting their participation in the survey and 140 responses were received. Critics may say that the response rate was low with 20%, but considering the fact that the whole population consisted only of 719 people, convincing a 140 to participate in a voluntary survey on something respondents did for leisure is an acceptable return rate.

The first question for this study investigated how many hosts registered their screening as *open* or *fully booked*. *Open* screenings are defined on the film's website as an event that allows anyone to request an invitation to it. However, granting an invitation request is at the discretion of the host, but for the purpose of this study it is assumed that by registering a screening as *open*, it is the intention of the host to allow others to join their screening, hence making it public. These totaled up as follows: 78 registered *open* screenings, 57 registered *fully booked*

screenings, and five did not respond to this question. It is difficult to compare the results of the survey with the information on *open* or *fully booked* screenings represented from the website because there were several screenings that were later changed from *open* to *fully booked*, but this may have been due to venue capacity being reached and does not represent the hosts' original intentions.

The responses to the question regarding where the screening took place were as follows: 94 screenings were held in a *private space*, 41 were held in a *public space*. As above, 5 did not answer. Combining these elements, the screenings can be further broken down into four possibilities: *private/open*, *private/fully booked* and *public/open*, *public/fully booked*. Figure 1 below represents these categories based on the 135 completed responses.

Figure 1 shows that the majority of screenings (78) – both in a public space (38 respondents) and a private space (40) – were registered as *open* compared to 57 screenings that were registered as *fully booked*. However, framed from another angle, we can say that nearly 70% were held in a *private space* versus the 30% that were held in *public space*. This is not necessarily surprising given that the intention of Private-Public Screenings is to release the film to private persons. However, they are encouraged to share the film publicly and less than 30% were actually shared in public spaces. The occurrence of three screenings that took place in a *public space* but were registered as *fully booked* turned out to be held at schools. Two were registered as *fully booked* because they were intended only for the students of that particular course or classroom, and the other was explained as a “limitation of space.” Nearly 70% of the reported screenings were held in private spaces, and of those about 42% were open to the public, that is, originally registered as *open*. This means that 40 hosts indeed intended to open a private space in order to make the event publicly available: social sharing becomes a public event.

In an attempt to collect more information regarding the decisions to share the film publicly, the hosts were asked to explain their choice, if possible, as to why they registered their screening as *open* or *fully booked*. Only those 94 screenings that took place in a *private space* are taken into consideration, as the screenings held in public spaces preclude their openness. Based on the 40 answers received, the responses were grouped into the following categories: considerations of space, desire to meet new people versus discomfort of allowing strangers into their home, desire to share the film or band with others versus keeping it among family and friends, past experiences, and

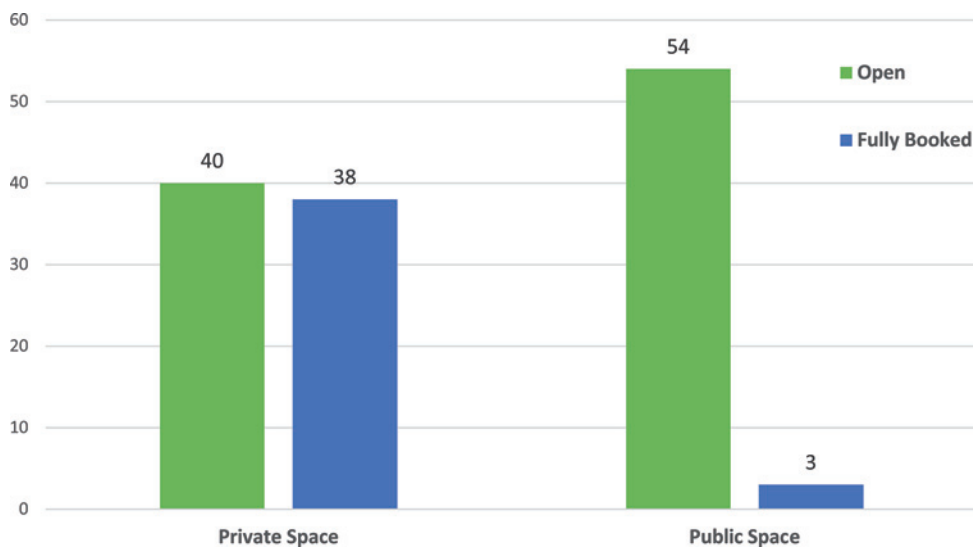


Fig. 1: The Ghost of Piramida Screenings by Category.

other. Other refers to instances such as office policy requiring it to be open to all employees (while still remaining a private space based on our earlier definition), not enough open screenings in their area, or the inability to guarantee the time schedule (in which case it was registered as fully booked). Table 1 gives an overview of the categorization from those 40 respondents who offered an explanation:

Based on the responses available, the most cited reason for not hosting an open screening was the lack of space or seating. Several respondents qualified this response by explaining that they would have been willing to host an open screening had they had more space to do so. It would have been interesting to qualify the factors that did lead to screenings in private spaces that were open to strangers, but unfortunately the hosts were not so forthcoming in their responses here. Interestingly, the hosts of these same 40 screenings in private spaces that were open to strangers all responded to the follow-up question, which asked if anyone new (previously unknown or outside their usual social network) attended and how they

would characterize the experience. Eighteen responded with a yes and all of them qualified it with a comment about it being a positive experience and 22 responded with a no. There was an indication from five of the respondents who answered no that this was an unfortunate outcome, as the following two quotes illustrate: “I would have welcomed it” and “No, unfortunately. I did not get any requests.” This leads to the assumption that these hosts had hoped to include new people at their screenings.

While in the survey the hosts did not offer further information on the reason why they had opened their private spaces to strangers, they provided comments that accompanied the photos submitted to *flickr*. For example, a host from Canada wrote, “in the end we had 20 people over, far more than the 6-8 we expected. Glad we had enough room. I loved the movie, and I think most of the others did too. It gave us lots to talk about as we got into the Akavit and Carlsberg after the show”, (Flickr, 2011), or another host from Mexico, who stated that they had “a discussion after the screening and it was amazing,

Table 1: Reasons for registering screening as open or fully booked.

| Reason for opening private space | Marked as open | Marked as fully booked | Reason for not opening private space |
|--|----------------|------------------------|---|
| Had enough space or seating | 1 | 19 | Not enough space or seating |
| Desire to meet new people | 4 | 3 | Uncomfortable sharing home with strangers |
| Wanted to share film or band with others | 4 | 2 | For family/friends only |
| Based on good past experience | 2 | 1 | Based on bad past experience |
| Other | 3 | 1 | Other |

plenty of opinions about the beauty of music” (Flickr, 2013). A host from Italy further elaborated on having met new people by chance: “We were 14 people, including two ladies who a friend of us saw along the street and invited to come, who were almost totally unaware of what was about to happen. They seemed very happy at the end of the movie” (Flickr, 2011).

This research shows the social value of bringing people together to create an event, as some screenings led to further social interactions, discussions and a memorable viewing experience. In particular, the aspect of mutual interest as a bond of trust is worthy of further investigation; many of these hosts trusted enough in Efterklang as a brand to make a home film screening public.

Efterklang set out to create a new method in film distribution with the aim of connecting people. From their perspective, they feel that they have succeeded. The results of this survey, while small in sample size, are also an indication of this, by showing that a percentage of hosts had clear intentions to make these events publicly accessible. In a follow-up interview with Efterklang, the band stated that the driving force for creating Private-Public Screenings came from the desire to get people to connect with each in person and watch the film away from their computers. By setting up the website and creating a network of hosts who were willing to screen the film, they were essentially “using the Internet to get people away from the Internet” (Brauer, 2013). By allowing the hosts to design their own screenings, Efterklang gave each of them a personal stake in the venture and a means of co-creating something meaningful. This is something that places emphasis on the social aspects and experience of viewing a film rather than on financial or commercial gain. And, like the film, the business model itself is also available for free to others who want to adopt it.

Conclusion

Social sharing to create public events is a new form of information behavior that warrants further examination. This study presents Private-Public Screenings as an example of this new form of information behavior and has examined whether these screenings really were public.

The results of a survey conducted with 135 hosts of such a screening conclude that many of these screenings can indeed be called public. The majority (58%) of Private-Public Screenings held between February and March 2013 for the film *The Ghost of Piramida* were registered as *open* screenings, which would make them accessible to

the public. Additionally, nearly 30% of those screenings were held in a *private space* that was transformed into a *public space* for the purpose of the screening. That number alone is a significant result, because it identifies a considerable number of people who are willing to open their homes (or other private space) to strangers for the purpose of creating an event and sharing a film, based only around mutual interest in a band. Further, another 19% stated that their reason for not registering their screening as *open* was based on a lack of space. It might be possible, that they, too, would open their homes to others in order to share a film if they had the space to accommodate them.

Currently, people may tend towards staying home rather than going to the theater, but they are still seeking social interaction. Perhaps Private-Public Screenings provides a new means of finding balance between the two. By using Private-Public Screenings as a context to examine user behavior, there is the potential here to design future screening projects with the possibility to connect people on an even larger scale.

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